FORMING A CONSUMER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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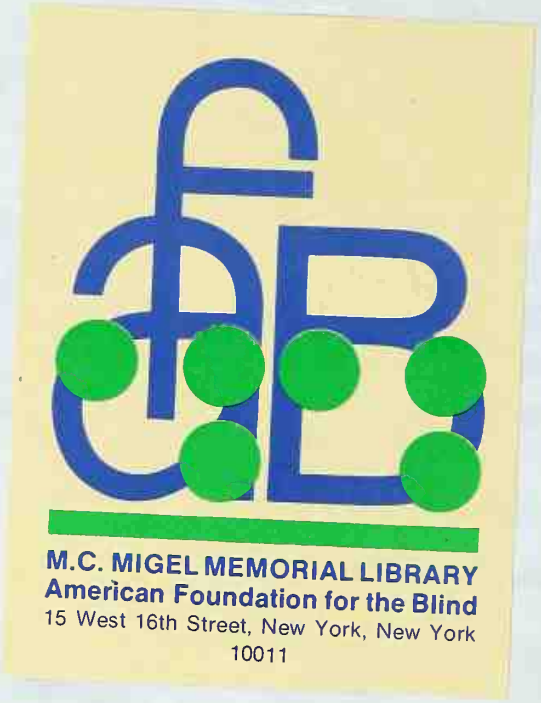
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National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
The Library of Congress

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FORMING A CONSUMER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Consumer Relations Section

National Library Service
for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

Library of Congress

October 12, 1982

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Many network libraries currently have the opportunity to call upon a group of consumers (library users) for advice. This group may be called a consumer advisory committee, library advisory group, consumers' council, citizens' advisory council, and so forth. These groups may differ widely from library to library in structure and in function, but for the most part, they have been brought together to exchange information and ideas with library staff and to act in an advocacy role on behalf of the library.

For the purpose of the present document, the term "consumer advisory committee" will refer to all such advice-giving groups, consisting partially or totally of library users.

Purpose. The purpose of a consumer advisory committee is to serve in a consultative capacity to the library, its primary objective being to aid in the improvement of library services to blind and physically handicapped individuals. Specific examples of activities for consideration by a consumer advisory committee include:

- to increase public awareness of the library's facilities and services
- to increase the potential for services to unserved individuals
- to help the library establish priorities for future expansion of services
- to encourage the efforts of volunteers in service to users
- to provide comments and reactions regarding the development of new equipment and materials

These examples illustrate the range of activities for consideration by a consumer advisory committee. Each committee will no doubt develop additional activities which are specific to its needs.

Justification. When funding is needed to form or continue a consumer advisory committee, librarians are often faced with the task of justifying such requests to their funding agencies. If such a request is not granted, plans for the formation or continuation of a consumer advisory committee may need to go forth without the promise of funding.

Although it is desirable to pay the travel expenses of members, an inability to do so should not be a reason for cancelling plans to form or continue a consumer advisory committee. Some consumers may be in a position to pay their own expenses or do their own fund-raising. Organizational representatives are often able to receive travel funding from the group they represent.

A major point to emphasize when writing a justification is that Section 4.1.1.4 of the Standards of Service for the Library of Congress Network of Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, states:

> Each network library shall have an advisory committee composed of a representative group of users and members of related organizations. Input from advisory committees should be used in the formulation of policy and in planning. Regular meetings shall be held.

Composition of the Committee. The size of a typical consumer advisory committee ranges from eight to fifteen members, not including library staff. In most cases, library staff are not an official part of the committee, but should attend all meetings. The librarian usually presents a "library update" at some point early in the agenda, while other library staff should be available for discussion and note-taking.

Usually, at least four national organizations are asked to appoint a local representative. These organizations are: the American Council of the Blind; the National Federation of the Blind; the Blinded Veterans Association; and the National Association of the Physically Handicapped. Typically, the librarian contacts the president of the organization's state affiliate or chapter to request a representative. The president of the consumer organization will supply the name and address of the individual to represent the organization. That individual can then be sent all necessary materials for the upcoming meeting. Organizational representatives should be subject to the same restrictions regarding length of term, serving consecutive terms, etc., as are all other members of the committee.

If the state president of an organization cannot be located, contact the organization's national office (addresses listed in Appendix A). One or two of the national organizations may not have an affiliate or chapter in the area, although new chapters are formed frequently, and the librarian must maintain contact with the absent organizations and ask to be notified when a chapter is begun in the library's area of service. In addition, other local organizations of blind and physically handicapped persons have been formed in many communities and should also be contacted for representatives.

When selecting the original members for a consumer advisory committee, several considerations should be kept in mind. An effort should be made to attain a balanced representation of consumers on the committee. Such factors as media use, age, county of residence, handicap, and sex should all be considered to ensure a committee which is representative of the majority of library users.

Organizing the First Meeting. Rather than selecting specific members for an advisory committee, some librarians have found it useful to call a meeting of all interested individuals. In this way, it is possible to gather some idea of which users might be interested in serving on such a committee and some general notions of their conceptions of what purposes an advisory committee might serve. A meeting of this type should be well-publicized in newsletters and other publications and planned well in advance of the actual date of the meeting. The disadvantage of such an approach is that library users who live closest to the library are most likely to attend the meeting and there may not be a good cross section of users among the attendees.

In any event, when the advisory committee is actually formed, the librarian should select some of the initial members for the advisory committee, while agencies and organizations should select their own representatives. After the committee has established its structure, and bylaws have been adopted, some of the committee members should be elected by the full committee, while others are appointed by the librarian, consumer organization, or other agency.

The librarian usually presides at the first meeting of the advisory committee. At that meeting, nominations can be called for from the floor for the election of a chairperson pro tem. The first meeting will be primarily concerned with the purposes and structure of the advisory committee. At some point during the first meeting, the chairperson should appoint a committee of from five to seven individuals to draft bylaws. If the initial meeting is quite small, it may be desirable to ask all members present to serve on the bylaws committee. The bylaws committee may find it helpful to study copies of the bylaws from consumer advisory committees of other libraries. Initially the bylaws are adopted by a majority vote. Subsequent changes to the bylaws will require a two-thirds vote.

Before the meeting is adjourned, the members should agree on a specific date, time, and place for the next meeting, at which the report of the bylaws committee will be presented. Immediately after the bylaws have been adopted by the full committee, whether at the second, third, or other meeting, the election of permanent officers should take place.

Transportation. Often transportation to meetings can be a major obstacle to the development of a consumer advisory committee. Some members may live great distances from the library. Other members may have serious problems with local transportation.

In some states, the consumer advisory committee meets in several locations each year in order to minimize long distances and high travel costs for the same members time after time. Volunteers are sometimes recruited to assist with local transportation.

In many locations transportation will not be a problem. However, where transportation barriers do exist, no individual should be excluded from consideration as a potential advisory committee member solely because of a transportation difficulty.

Agenda. The preparation of a detailed agenda in advance of a meeting is a task that typically falls to the chairperson of the advisory committee in consultation with the librarian. An agenda should prescribe the specific order in which business is to be handled and delineate specific topic areas to be discussed. Even if not written as part of the agenda, the chairperson should have some clear idea of the length of time required for the discussion of each item. These times, however, may vary considerably from meeting to meeting.

A typical agenda for a consumer advisory committee meeting which lasts from several hours to a full day should include:

- call to order
- call of the roll
- the reading and approval of minutes
- report of the chairperson
- report of the vice-chairperson
- report of the secretary (if there is any correspondence to be read)
- report of the librarian
- reports of standing committees
- reports of special committees
- unfinished business
- new business
- announcements
- adjournment

A speaker or other program item may be proceeded to at any point during the meeting.

The agenda should be circulated to members, in the appropriate format, at least fourteen days prior to the meeting.

Minutes. It is essential that complete minutes be kept of each meeting of a consumer advisory committee. The minutes are a record of the proceedings of the meeting, and should reflect what was done at the meeting, not what was said by the members.

The group may choose to elect a secretary, who shall take minutes, or the task may be passed around from member to member. In any event, the task of taking minutes should fall to a member of the advisory committee, not to a library staff member.

Normally, the minutes of each meeting are read and approved at the beginning of the next regular meeting, immediately after the call of the roll. Minutes must be reviewed and approved by committee members before the library should consider them an actual representation of what transpired at the meeting.

To keep an accurate record of the proceedings, the following format is suggested. The first paragraph should contain:

- kind of meeting (regular, special, etc.)
- the name of the committee

- the date and time of the meeting, and place if it is not always the same
- the fact that the regular chairperson and secretary were present or, in their absences, the names of the persons who substituted for them
- whether the minutes of the previous meeting were read--and approved as read, or as corrected, or not read--and approved as mailed

The body of the minutes should contain a separate paragraph for each subject covered. It should contain:

- all motions, except any that were withdrawn, giving
  (a) the wording of the motion
  (b) any amendment to the motion
  (c) the disposition of the motion
  (d) the name of the mover, but not the seconder

- all points of order and appeals, whether sustained or lost, together with the reasons given for the chair's ruling

The last paragraph should contain:

- the hour of adjournment

The minutes must be signed by the secretary.

When reporting a vote in the minutes, if the vote was taken by a show of hands or by ballot, the number on each side must be entered. If the vote was by roll call, the names of those voting on each side and those answering "present" should be recorded. When a question is considered informally, the same information should be recorded. The name and subject of a guest speaker should be given, but no effort should be made to summarize the remarks.

For more discussion and a sample preparation of minutes, consult the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Revised.

Parliamentary Procedure. Adherence to proper parliamentary procedure is an essential element of any well-functioning organization. There are a number of books on parliamentary procedure in special format available through the library program. A current bibliography is attached as Appendix B. This list should be updated and distributed to all members of any consumer advisory committee.

Bylaws. One of the first tasks to be undertaken by a newly-formed consumer advisory committee is to formulate a set of bylaws. The bylaws should be a single document outlining the basic rules of the committee. This document may be called constitution, bylaws, constitution and bylaws, policies and procedures, or some other term. Whatever name the committee uses to

describe its basic set of rules, the form and content of the document should reflect certain basic principles of organization and operation.

The bylaws may be drawn up by a committee that has been appointed for this purpose or by the body as a whole. The bylaws should serve three major functions:

- to define the primary characteristics of the committee
- to prescribe how the committee functions
- to specify all rules that the committee considers so important that they
  - (a) cannot be changed without previous notice to the members and the vote of a specified majority, or
  - (b) cannot be suspended (except under special conditions)

The number of articles in the bylaws may vary somewhat depending on the needs of the committee. However, all bylaws should contain the following articles:

- name of the committee
- purpose
- members
- officers
- meetings
- committees
- parliamentary authority
- amendment to the bylaws

The following is a sample set of bylaws. These bylaws may be used as a framework when designing a document to meet a committee's special needs. Any part can be changed or modified in any way. If additional guidance is required when formulating bylaws, consult the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Revised.

SAMPLE BYLAWS

ARTICLE I.

Name.

The name of this committee is the _____ (full name of committee) of the _____ (full name of library), which hereafter shall be referred to as the Committee and the Library, respectively.

ARTICLE II.

Purpose.

The purpose of this Committee is to give advice and make recommendations to the Library and, when appropriate, to the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress on practices, policies, and goals of library services to blind and physically handicapped individuals. The Committee shall further serve as an advocate for the promotion and further development of library services for all blind and physically handicapped individuals.

ARTICLE III.

Members.

SECTION 1. Membership on this Committee is representative of those organizations and individuals having a direct interest in library services to blind and physically handicapped persons.

SECTION 2. This Committee shall consist of no less than ten members, of which at least seven must be consumers.

SECTION 3. Members shall serve four-year terms:

A. Terms shall be so established that one-half of all terms shall expire every two years;

B. At the first Committee meeting, members shall draw lots to determine the length of their terms, one-half for two-year terms and one-half for four-year terms;

C. Thereafter, all persons appointed or elected to the Committee shall serve a term of four years.

SECTION 4. Membership shall consist of:

A. One representative from each major state and local organization of consumers (specify names of organizations);

B. One member from the commission or primary state agency for the blind, _____ (official name of body);

C. Two members appointed by the librarian; and

D. _____ (approximately four to six) members-at-large.

SECTION 5. At least one member of the Committee shall be physically handicapped, and at least one member of the Committee shall be the parent of a child who is a Library user.

SECTION 6. Each member is expected to attend all meetings. After two consecutive unexcused absences, the seat shall be considered vacant.

SECTION 7. Each member, being present, shall have one vote. Library staff shall not vote, but shall serve as ex officio members of the Committee.

SECTION 8. Prior to the first meeting of the Committee, the members-at-large shall be selected by the staff of the Library. Thereafter, members-at-large shall be elected by the full Committee.

SECTION 9. Nomination of members-at-large:

A. Every two years, nominations will be solicited for members-at-large on the Committee;

B. Notices soliciting nominations for the Committee shall be publicized in the Library's newsletter and other area-wide publications directed toward blind and physically handicapped individuals, to ensure the same fair chance of knowing about the available seats on the Committee;

C. At least thirty days prior to the final meeting of the calendar year, all nominations must be received by the Nominating Committee;

D. The agencies and consumer organizations shall be contacted directly through their heads or presidents, who will submit the name of their representative.

SECTION 10. Election of members-at-large:

A. Each member shall receive the slate of nominees from the chairperson of the Nominating Committee, in writing, no less than fourteen days prior to the election;

B. At the last meeting of the calendar year, the Nominating Committee shall present its slate of candidates for the election of members-at-large;

C. Nominations shall also be accepted from the floor at the time of the election;

D. Members-at-large shall be elected by a majority vote of all members present and voting at that meeting;

E. At the first meeting in the following calendar year the term for all new members shall begin;

F. No member shall be elected or appointed to more than two consecutive terms;

G. A member who has served more than half a term is considered to have served a full term.

SECTION 11. Vacancies:

A. A vacancy on the Committee by a member-at-large shall be filled by an election at the next regular meeting of the full Committee, provided the seat being vacated is not that of chairperson;

B. Vacancies which occur among agency or organizational representatives shall be filled by those groups.

ARTICLE IV.

Officers.

SECTION 1. There shall be elected from the membership the following officers: a chairperson; a vice-chairperson; and a secretary.

SECTION 2. The term of office shall run one year, from January 1 through December 31.

SECTION 3. After the first year, no person may hold office who has not been a member of the Committee for at least one year.

SECTION 4. Nomination and election of officers:

A. At least thirty days prior to the final meeting of each calendar year, nominations must be received by the Nominating Committee;

B. Each member shall receive the slate of candidates for office from the chairperson of the Nominating Committee, in writing, no less than fourteen days prior to the election;

C. At the last meeting of each calendar year, the Nominating Committee shall present its slate of candidates for the election of officers;

D. Nominations are also accepted from the floor at the time of the election;

E. Officers are elected by a majority vote of all members present and voting at that meeting;

F. No officer may serve more than three consecutive terms in the same office;

G. An officer who has served more than half a term in the office is considered to have served a full term.

SECTION 4. Duties of the officers:

A. The officers shall perform the duties prescribed by these bylaws and by the parliamentary authority adopted by the Committee;

B. The chairperson shall preside at all meetings, appoint committees, and perform related duties;

C. The vice-chairperson, upon the absence of the chairperson, shall perform the duties of the chairperson and discharge other such duties as may from time to time be required;

D. The secretary shall be responsible for notifying members of meetings, taking minutes, distributing copies of minutes, in the appropriate format, to all members, and other related duties.

SECTION 5. The chairperson of the Committee and at least one other officer must be a Library user.

SECTION 6. Vacancies:

A. A vacancy in the office of the chairperson is filled immediately by the vice-chairperson. A new vice-chairperson shall be elected at the next regular meeting of the full Committee;

B. A vacancy in the office of vice-chairperson or secretary shall be filled by an election at the next regular meeting of the full Committee.

ARTICLE V.

Meetings.

SECTION 1. Regular meetings of the Committee shall be held at least four times each year.

SECTION 2. All meetings shall be held in a location which has facilities accessible to all persons, including those who are mobility impaired.

SECTION 3. The first meeting of each calendar year shall be held in _____ (location of Library). The location of all other meetings shall be determined by the members of the Committee.

SECTION 4. Special meetings may be called by the chairperson or at least three members of the Committee, provided that all members are notified at least seven days in advance of the special meeting.

SECTION 5. The agenda for each meeting shall be distributed to each member by the chairperson, in the appropriate format, no less than fourteen days prior to each meeting.

SECTION 6. Fifty percent plus one member shall constitute a quorum for the purpose of conducting business.

SECTION 7. All meetings shall be open to anyone who wishes to observe.

ARTICLE VI.

Committees.

SECTION 1. The chairperson shall appoint the following standing committees: Bylaws Committee; Nominating Committee; and Legislative Committee.

A. The Bylaws Committee shall consider proposed amendments to the Committee's bylaws. The Bylaws Committee shall have the duty of presenting any proposed amendments to the members for deliberation and action.

B. The Nominating Committee, consisting of three members of the full Committee, shall present a slate of candidates to the membership, one nomination for each seat to be filled by election and one nomination for each officer.

C. The Legislative Committee shall keep the membership informed of all relevant federal, state, and local legislation.

SECTION 2. Special committees may be appointed by the chairperson as needed.

SECTION 3. The chairperson shall be an ex officio member of all standing and special committees, except the Nominating Committee.

ARTICLE VII.

Parliamentary Authority.

The rules contained in the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Revised shall govern the Committee in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with these bylaws and any special rules of order the Committee may adopt.

ARTICLE VIII.

Amendment to the Bylaws.

These bylaws may be amended at any meeting by a two-thirds vote of those members present and voting, provided such amendment has been filed with the Bylaws Committee and distributed to all members, in the appropriate format, at least thirty days in advance of the meeting.

Adopted _____ (date of adoption)

APPENDIX A

SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS

OF BLIND AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED INDIVIDUALS

American Council of the Blind
1211 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Suite 506
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 833-1251
(800) 424-8666

Blinded Veterans Association
1735 DeSales Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 347-4010

National Association of the Physically Handicapped
76 Elm Street
London, Ohio 43140
(614) 852-1664

National Federation of the Blind
1800 Johnson Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21230
(301) 659-9314

APPENDIX B

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

RC 14286 Robert's Rules of Order, newly revised by Sarah Corbin Robert

TB 3273 Robert's Rules of Order, newly revised by Sarah Corbin Robert

BR 1862 Robert's Rules of Order, newly revised by Sarah Corbin Robert

BRA 3258 A Manual of Parliamentary Procedure, by John Quillen Tilson

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